



**KIDS
THESE DAYS**

Biblical Help for Families

“Whom the Lord Loveth. . .”

Disciplining in Love

John Howell Jr.

There are portions of the Bible that soothe my soul and spirit, with the Word of God functioning like a healing balm. Those are the verses I run to when I am hurting and confused, and the Scripture reassures me. For example, Philippians 1:6 reminds me that God will finish the work he has started in me. Ephesians 2:10 tells me that I am God’s project, His “*workmanship*.” The Greek word for “*workmanship*” is the word we translate into the English as “poem.” It greatly encourages me that my life is a poem being written by God. As discussed earlier in this study, it is also very reassuring to see, learn that, by means of the new birth, the believer becomes a “*child*” of the living God. I run to that truth when times are tough, and I find encouragement in remembering that the God of the universe is my Father!

The Bible works to touch my soul and spirit in other ways as well, and not just in the pleasant and soothing ways as do the verses above. The Bible student experiences the reality that the Bible is “*living and powerful*,” and that it penetrates “*even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit*.” As the believer reads the Bible, the Bible reads the believer! And sometimes the Bible’s work is in the areas of “*reproof*” and “*correction*” (2 Tim. 3:16). When the Word functions in this way, God’s Word is convicting, and it creates tension in my heart as God sheds His light into areas of my life that are not rightly aligned with who I am in Christ.

Those types of verses can sting.

When I encounter truth in the Scripture that informs me of the disciplining hand of God in my life, I find it difficult to “like” or “enjoy” those verses and the truths that they convey. I instead have a different relationship with those verses and passages that reprove and correct than I have with the reassuring verses of God’s grace. We are going to be looking at those reprovings and correcting types of Bible truths in this chapter. They are truths that I am learning to love and trust, and truths that help me to better understand my work and my goals as a dad who is responsible for the nurture and discipline of his children.

This article focuses on the big picture of discipline, and the next section offers a practical look at the application of discipline in our homes.

The Power Passages: Hebrews 12:6, Jeremiah 1:5

We have learned that the husband/wife relationship is used by God to teach beautiful spiritual truths about the Lord Jesus Christ and his bride, the church. In Eph. 5:25 we see the love that our Lord has for His church and are taught that the same supernatural, sacrificial love is to flow from the husband to his wife. Likewise, we are now learning that the parent/child relationship is used by God to teach important spiritual truths about the Christian's relationship with his heavenly Father. Children are instructed to "*obey your parents in the Lord*" (Eph. 6:1). When a child renders obedience to his parents, God sees this submission by the child as if the child is submitting to God Himself. When a child disobeys his parents, the converse applies—and the child ultimately is guilty of rebelling against God Himself. When this occurs, I tell children that they are in a dangerous position and encourage them to get off the "myway highway" before they wreck!

Parents, the above truth should bring authority to our voices as we instruct our children. However, we must also think about the flip side of this coin. If the child's relationship to his parents mirrors his spiritual attitude toward God, the parent's responsibility to his child should mirror an accurate depiction of God to the child. Now I know that this illustration can't be pushed to the limit, because we parents are still made of flesh. We have the treasure of Jesus Christ in our "earthen vessels," our mortal minds and bodies (2 Cor. 4:7). Nonetheless, as parents we have the job of radiating the attributes of God to our children. Through our work as parents in the daily slog of life, we teach them about love. We teach them about the joys and blessings of being in a family. We teach them about forgiveness and mercy. We should even, through our lives and leadership, teach them about holiness and reverence.

Now here is the biggie as it relates to our study. Parents, the way we discipline our children teaches them about a very important attribute of God—His justice! Let's investigate.

1. I am God's child. God loves me. Therefore, God disciplines me.

The power passage for this truth is Hebrews 12:6-7:

- (6) *For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son who He receiveth.*
(7) *If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?*

So we now encounter the types of passages in Scripture that, for me at least, do not function as the balm of Gilead. They elicit an "oh me!" rather than an "amen!" But the Bible is filled with reminders that God disciplines His children, as He uses "*all things*" to conform His child "*to the image of His Son*" (Rom. 8:28-29). The Bible student encounters this teaching from the Word of God in Romans 5:3, where the believer is instructed to, by faith, "*glory in tribulations,*" trusting that the hard times are being used by our Father for His good purposes. James right out of gate in his epistle instructs the believer to "*count it all joy*" when trials hit his life as part of the specific or permissive will of his heavenly Father (James 1:2). While some of the "*all things*" phenomena may not be connected to my disobedience, some of these trials are a direct result of my sins and my failures to walk in the Spirit—and those moments and circumstances can be seen as my heavenly Father chastening, or disciplining, me as His child.

Hold on! Isn't this all about *agape*? Isn't love the big attribute of God that overrules all other parts of His glorious being? Isn't this *agape*, this love of God that we have been studying and

learning to cherish, the default position of God? Such teaching is not Scriptural. Though that kind of teaching is popular in denominations that have left the moorings of Scripture, it is incomplete. This view does not address the reality that God is righteous, and He is just! His justice must always be satisfied if He is to be true to His nature. For these reasons, God does not (and cannot) sweep unrighteousness and disobedience under the rug. His justice must be satisfied. That is where discipline comes into the picture.

In this passage from Hebrews, we learn that the love of the Father motivates Him to “train up” His child to maturity. “Train up” is a simplified definition of “*chasteneth*.” The word is also closely connected to the word “*nurture*” in Eph. 6:4 that we studied in the preceding piece. “*Chasteneth*,” according to Strong’s Lexicon, means “to train children...with words or with blows.” When God is in the equation, the word can also mean (to use Strong’s words again) “to chasten by the affliction of evil and calamities.” Obviously, this word “*chasteneth*” from the Word means business! God disciplines us, and He has everything in His arsenal to use in the process because He is God.

And He performs this work because He loves us.

This passage also reminds us that God has the option to “*scourge*” as part of this disciplinary process. And this word means pretty much what one would expect: to flog. This is the word used to describe the extreme beatings to which our Savior submitted at the hands of sinful men. When the Christian steps out of the will of the Father, his Father will take any means necessary to show him the error of his ways so that there can be restored fellowship (and the joy that accompanies fellowship with God).

Why does it have to be this way? God’s Word explains why it has to be this way by asking a question that is rather obvious. Here is a paraphrasing of Hebrews 12:7: “What kind of dad would neglect to discipline his son?” This question is loaded with truth and significance. The inference is that a father who does not love his son is the kind of father who would neglect to discipline his son. This torpedoed the silly-but-dangerous concept of a parent “loving” a child too much to correct his child when the child misbehaves.

In studying Ephesians 6:4 (the “what-not-to-do” part), we encountered this warning to parents: “*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath...*” One way to provoke a child to wrath is for a parent to neglect his responsibility to discipline his child. Thus, our failure to provide discipline will have consequences. So, in addition to the spiritual ramifications of failing to discipline our children discussed above, let’s be reminded that there are also practical consequences of failing to discipline our children. They will misbehave in various ways at increasing levels of disobedience, causing all kinds of unrest in their homes and in the hearts of their loved ones.

It is the responsibility of parents to convey important information about God to our children. Children will learn about the nature of God through the discipline that they receive (or fail to receive) from their parents. They will rise up in disobedience if we fail to provide discipline.

What a serious and sobering responsibility for parents!

2. Effective discipline is relationship and knowledge driven

Another important dimension of discipline that we can learn from the beautiful Heavenly Father/child of God reality from the Bible is that discipline is relationally driven. Discipline is not one-size-fits-all. Our amazing God who chastens His child is a God who knows His child intimately. Thus, He is a Father who knows exactly what His child needs in order to affect the change that is needed or to administer the discipline that is needed.

For this to sink in, we will take a break from the Bible's teaching on chastening and disciplining and focus on one of the Scripture's edifying truths. Consider the truths communicated from God to Jeremiah in this power passage. God is commissioning His prophet for a very challenging task, and He provides these powerful words of reassurance to Jeremiah: *"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations"* (Jer. 1:5). When God speaks of "knowing" something, something much bigger than intellectual knowledge is involved. God knows intimately, and He knows each of His children intimately. God assures Jeremiah that His heavenly Father knows about every part of his being—body, soul and spirit. God assures Jeremiah that He knows Jeremiah's heart. In fact, God tells Jeremiah that He knew Jeremiah before he was even formed in his mother's womb!

Because of the intimacy of the relationship, our God knows us—inside and out. It is my belief that God created me in His infinite mind some time in eternity past. He created me, His child—knowing when he would place me on this planet, all the details surrounding my arrival, and already knowing everything about me. The Bible teaches that God has a beautiful plan for me, for this life He has given me. Remember, I am God's poem. He is the Creator...He created me!

And He created you!

God knows his children. Thus, He disciplines us in knowledge—intimate knowledge—based on how He made us and applying exactly what we need to guide our growth to spiritual maturity, our growth to being *"conformed to the image of His Son"* (Rom. 8:29). This is how our heavenly Father disciplines each of us, his children. He knows exactly how to develop me, and how to develop you...though you and I are likely different in many ways.

The application should be obvious as we study the "big picture" of discipline in our homes: our work as our child's disciplinarian should also be driven by our detailed knowledge of our child or children.

We do not have the vantage point of God, of course, in that we are not infinitely aware of our child or children's makeup and spiritual reality at all times, as is God with us. But we can grow in our understanding of our child by liberally investing into the relationship our energy, time and focus. This will help us to be sensitive to where they are in life in terms of attitude. To know what type of disciplinary tool to attempt to apply, it is hugely helpful to know the behind-the-scenes reason our child is struggling with his behavior.

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